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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3546  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002262

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: BETHLEHEM OFFICIALS COMPLAIN ABOUT IDF INCURSIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 2154

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Bethlehem's Governor and Mayor complained to ConGenOffs that the IDF used Bethlehem's main streets three times over 24 hours en route to raids in towns in Bethlehem Governorate. Governor Salah Tamari said the IDF entered Bayt Sahur and detained Sa'id Awad Shibab early December 18, and entered Harmalah (southeast of Bethlehem) twice December 16-17, detaining 16 Palestinians. In each case, Tamari said the IDF used main roads near tourist sites to reach their targets.

12. (C) Bethlehem Mayor Victor Batarsah told PolFSN December 18 that the IDF movements through Bethlehem were small and did not themselves pose a threat to tourism. However, he said, continued IDF incursions, especially this close to Christmas, could frighten overnight tourists and cause disturbances that disrupt Christmas celebrations.

13. (SBU) According to PA Police contacts, public order police and civil defense officers have conducted extensive response drills in recent days to prepare for emergency responses, crowd control, and evacuations. Mayor Batarsah told local press that the PA is ready to deal with emergencies or disruptions without Israeli intervention. Large numbers of tourists are already arriving in Bethlehem in what is expected to be a record-breaking year for visitors to the city, he said.

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